

# Texas Office of State-Federal Relations



2020 Report  
to the Texas Legislature

---

## O V E R V I E W

---

The Texas Office of State-Federal Relations (OSFR or State-Fed) serves as the state's advocate in Washington, D.C., representing state government with the Administration, Congress, and federal agencies to champion the interests of Texas. To fulfill this mission, OSFR has offices in both Austin, Texas, and in Washington D.C. The Executive Director of the agency is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Texas Senate.

Established in 1965 as a division of the Governor's Office, OSFR became a separate agency in 1971. Under current law, OSFR is administratively attached to the Governor's Office.

The goal of OSFR is to increase the influence of the Governor and the Legislature over federal action that has a direct or indirect economic, fiscal, or regulatory impact on the state and its citizens, maintaining an active role for Texas in the national decision-making process.

This is accomplished by:

- Working with the Governor's Office, the Texas Legislature, and state agencies to coordinate a federal agenda for the State of Texas;
- Working with Congress, the Administration, and federal agencies to pass and implement legislation, policies, and rules favorable to Texas; and
- Providing to Texas officials and agencies information about federal initiatives, and assisting them in providing information to key members and committees in the nation's capital.

In addition to the Governor's Office staff in Washington D.C., OSFR coordinates office space for Texas agencies with a D.C. presence. Currently, the OSFR office hosts State of Texas employees from the Texas Department of Transportation and the Texas Workforce Commission.

---

## P R I O R I T I E S

---

The Texas Office of State-Federal Relations maintains close contact with members of the Texas Congressional Delegation, the Administration, federal agencies, and other relevant members of the Texas business community. While Texas' priorities change over time, 2020 was focused almost entirely on the whole of government response to the pandemic. In the midst of the pandemic, OSFR continued important work on economic development, transportation, and disaster response. Additionally, federal regulation and border security remain issues of foremost importance to our state leadership.

Texas is fortunate to be home to some of the most influential leaders in Washington. The Office of State-Federal Relations provides timely information to Congress and serves as a resource to our state and federal partners, effectively utilizing the 36 Texas Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and two Senators.

In 2020, that collaboration proved critical in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and continues throughout the recovery and subsequent federal funding.

## **COVID-19 Response and Recovery**

In many ways, the past year of the Office of State-Federal Relations was spent almost exclusively responding to the pandemic. On January 27, 2020, Governor Abbott officially activated the State Medical Operations Center, triggering all state emergency response agencies to initiate a statewide response. On March 13, Governor Abbott declared a statewide disaster. These events and others kicked off a whole of government state-federal response that has now lasted more than a year. The ongoing response has consisted of many different aspects, including, but not limited to: communications; state and federal disaster declarations; testing; vaccinations; and mobilizing resources. Throughout the pandemic the office has been engaged at every level, every step of the way, particularly as each aspect of the response was colored by requisite federal funding and resources. As the collective response endures, State-Fed will continue to serve as a critical connector between state and federal officials while all levels of government work together to effectively respond to the pandemic.

## **Pandemic Communications**

The whole of government response to the pandemic has relied heavily on communication and information sharing. State-Fed bolstered the state's ability to share information in several ways, including the organization of weekly COVID-19 briefings between the Congressional Delegation and state officials, specifically the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). These scheduled briefings provided an opportunity in real-time for the state to both inform federal partners of the situation on the ground and also share resource needs. The Office also participated in daily briefings given by federal agencies on the various prongs of the response. State-Fed facilitated conversations between Governor Abbott and various administration officials, including a weekly governors-only call with the White House Coronavirus Task Force. As the Office engaged federal partners to reinforce the state's resource and informational needs—ranging from testing to federal boots on the ground to therapeutics and vaccines—it was also able to provide feedback on the state's response.

## **State and Federal Disaster Declarations**

In January of 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) determined that a Public Health Emergency (PHE) existed as a result of the threat from the coronavirus. The PHE was continuously renewed throughout the year to allow the federal government to more effectively respond to the needs of states. Subsequently, on March 13, 2020, Governor Abbott declared a State of Disaster for all Texas counties due to the threat of the coronavirus, authorizing the use of necessary state resources. The Governor's declaration also set the stage for Texas to become one of the first states to request a Major Disaster Declaration from the President just ten days later. The request was granted shortly thereafter, opening up new sources for individual and public assistance to help Texas respond to the public health emergency. Collectively, these three declarations paved the way for Texas to effectively respond to the pandemic. Throughout the year, State-Fed augmented and reinforced the sharing of information to assist in the seamless coordination between the state and federal government.

## **Federal Resources**

During the early days of the pandemic, access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was critical, as states were working feverishly with the federal government to acquire PPE for first responders and medical workers. Texas was one of the first states to request the state allocation of PPE from the Strategic National Stockpile for distribution. While the Office assisted the state

in securing its share of PPE that the federal government held in reserve, more was needed. To address this need, Governor Abbott created a Texas Supply Chain Strike Force to ensure Texas had an appropriate amount of PPE. State-Fed successfully worked with the Task Force and federal partners to ensure a shortage of PPE did not exist in Texas.

As the nation learned more about the pandemic and it became clear that personnel would be key to an effective response, Governor Abbott turned to the Texas National Guard. While the Texas National Guard focused on alleviating hospital capacity issues, increasing testing and staffing, manufacturing PPE, and ultimately assisting with vaccination efforts, State-Fed was tasked with ensuring the Guard was adequately funded. Governor Abbott activated the Texas National Guard in March, and in a few short weeks was granted Title 32 status, which qualified the state for 75% federal funding while the Guard is on the Governor's orders. Over time, State-Fed successfully worked with federal partners to increase the federal share to a full 100%—bolstering the state's response.

As Texas experienced a surge in cases and hospitalizations, medical staffing also became a pressing need for the state. State-Fed worked with state agencies to communicate the need for federal medical staffing resources and was ultimately successful in procuring federal Disaster Medical Assistance Teams to areas of need, such as the Rio Grande Valley and El Paso. These teams were sent in coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Defense (DOD).

### **COVID-19 Testing**

Adequate testing capabilities were crucial to the pandemic response. While much of the testing efforts were state-lead, State-Fed worked with federal partners to ensure federal testing resources came to Texas. Initially, these efforts resulted in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sending testing kits directly to the state, but the efforts culminated in a partnership with the U.S. Health and Human Services Department (HHS) to establish federally funded COVID-19 surge testing sites across the state, including in the Houston and Dallas areas. These initial Community Based Testing Sites allowed federal resources to flow to critical areas of need. The initial sites were the building blocks for future partnerships between the federal government and national retail and pharmacy chains. State-Fed also worked with HHS to surge testing resources to other hot spots, as needed, such as Edinburg and McLennan County. Ultimately, State-Fed worked with the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to ensure an extension of these federal efforts through the end of the year and beyond. Finally, as the federal government rolled out rapid testing kits, State-Fed worked to ensure these resources swiftly made their way to Texas, where they would be put to use as part of the Rapid Testing Pilot Program for Texas school systems to assist in mitigating the spread on campuses.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation and Administration**

In December, after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval, the federal government began shipping vaccines to Texas. State-Fed communicated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), among other federal partners, the state's guiding principles for the vaccine allocation process, and pushed for their rapid deployment to Texas. This work culminated in an initial CDC allocation of over 1.4 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to Texas for the month of December, where they were then rapidly distributed to providers. Texas would go on to be the first state to administer more than 1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. State-Fed continues to work with the federal government to ensure Texas receives its share of

vaccines by facilitating the relationship between lead federal agencies and Texas state health officials.

### **COVID-19 Federal Funding**

State-Fed worked with relevant executive agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to ensure Texas received significant physical and financial resources to respond to the pandemic. As a result of the Major Disaster Declaration, Texas was eligible for a federal cost share of many expenses. Though the process for federal reimbursement can be quite cumbersome, especially with a new and evolving threat, State-Fed worked with federal partners to ensure the state was reimbursed for eligible expenses.

Congress also responded to the pandemic with a robust series of legislative packages, culminating in trillions of dollars in federal spending—billions of which went to the state. Many of these supplemental funding streams flowed through existing programs, which are already administered by federal and state agencies. However, Congress did establish certain new sources of federal funds related to the pandemic, such as the Coronavirus Relief Fund, and money for public health and education, among others. State-Fed assisted the Office of the Governor and legislative leadership in implementing these new programs by communicating legislative intent, federal guidance, and troubleshooting federal red tape. The attached excerpt from the 2022-2023 Governor's Budget (Addendum I) captures a non-exhaustive list of these federal funding streams.

As the federal government's focus on COVID-19 funding continues into 2021, State-Fed will continue to serve as a conduit for increased action and coordination with federal partners in Congress as well as the executive branch. State-Fed will also continue working closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of the Treasury, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as they implement the year-end COVID-19 pandemic relief bill, and any future measures, to ensure investments in Texas public health, public safety, and education remain a top priority.

### **2020 Natural Disaster Response**

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic was not the only federally declared disaster to impact Texas in 2020. In the midst of the pandemic, State-Fed focused on an immediate and effective response to the historic hurricanes that hit the Texas Gulf Coast and Southeast Texas in 2020. State-Fed worked with the relevant executive agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to accelerate recovery for Texas. Serving as a critical connector between the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), FEMA, HHS, and Congress, State-Fed ensured all relevant agencies were connected to expedite the critical needs and challenges of Texas communities. State-Fed communicated the need for an expedited Emergency Declaration by the federal government following Hurricane Hanna, which was granted shortly after it made landfall.

State-Fed also served as a go-to resource for the Texas Congressional Delegation regarding recovery efforts, hosting briefings, coordinating requests specific to Members of Congress, as well as answering questions regarding the State and Federal Disaster Declarations process and constituent specific concerns. Effective communication to the Texas Congressional Delegation

and the executive branch increased visibility on the storms' impact and lead to an acceleration of federal resources to Texas.

### **Trade and Economic Development**

Prior to the pandemic, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) was signed into law between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The agreement modernized the 25-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and will support mutually beneficial trade between Texas and Mexico and Canada, the state's two largest export partners. The USMCA will create thousands of new jobs, and it allows Texas increased access to trade with Mexico and Canada. State-Fed worked with federal partners as this agreement was being negotiated to ensure they updated the trade agreement, but not at the expense of what has been a successful relationship with our trading partners, as trade policy with Mexico and Canada has an outsized economic impact on Texas relative to other states. The USMCA will continue to be implemented by the federal government and State-Fed will continue work to ensure its successful implementation.

State-Fed continued to promote economic development in Texas by partnering with Congressional members looking to highlight investment, including an effort to land Space Command Headquarters in Texas. Those efforts led to the state being a finalist, but ultimately losing out. State-Fed continues to cultivate effective relationships with stakeholders as they visit Washington to encourage job creation in our state. Along with the Economic Development and Tourism Division within the Office of the Governor, State-Fed actively conveys to Washington, D.C. that Texas is open for business.

### **Transportation**

State-Fed assisted the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) in successfully applying for, and receiving a federal grant to fund a major infrastructure project in the Permian Basin. The \$25 million grant will support the movement of people, goods, and services that support the largest source of oil and gas production in the country. The state's request was bolstered by the leadership of Senator Cornyn and Congressman Mike Conaway, who worked alongside State-Fed to secure these funds to increase safety along the corridor and connect the basin energy sector to global markets.

### **Mexico Water Treaty**

Governor Abbott, State-Fed, and members of the Texas Delegation worked with the Secretary of State and Mexican officials to ensure Mexico fulfilled its obligations to Texas under a 1944 Treaty that governs water sharing along the Rio Grande River. The five year cycle ended in October with Mexico fulfilling its obligations to the state, despite many months of being behind in its water deliveries. These deliveries are vital for irrigating crops, supplying water to municipalities, and conducting other operations along the Rio Grande. Governor Abbott penned a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to ensure enforcement of these treaty obligations. On the heels of this letter, State-Fed liaised directly with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the U.S. Department of State, the International Boundary Water Commission, and the Government of Mexico. Ultimately, this collaboration resulted in a successful fulfillment of Mexico's water obligations to deliver 1.7 million acre-feet of water. As the new five year cycle begins, State-Fed will continue to work to ensure Mexico abides by its obligations.

---

## PERSONNEL

---

The Texas Office of State-Federal Relations currently has four FTEs in its organizational and budget structure. The Executive Director is based in the Washington, D.C. office.

# Addendum I

---

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

2022-2023



TEXAS GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

PRESENTED TO THE 87TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

FEBRUARY 2021

---

---

## Federal Funding for COVID-19 Response

---

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed, and the President signed, several measures that provided significant and critical funding to the state. The Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), and most recently the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) have provided billions in funding for the state and local response to ensure the safety of their residents.

Many of these supplemental funding streams flowed through existing programs that state agencies administer. These programs include the Home-Delivered and Congregate Meals Program, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and others. In addition to the increases in funding for these existing programs, the CARES Act and other COVID-19 related legislation established temporary or one-time sources of federal funding unique to the pandemic. The Office of the Governor (OOG) worked, and continues to work, with legislative leaders including the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations to ensure these funds are utilized to efficiently respond to the pandemic without creating lasting requirements for future state spending. Below is a non-exhaustive list of these federal funding streams.

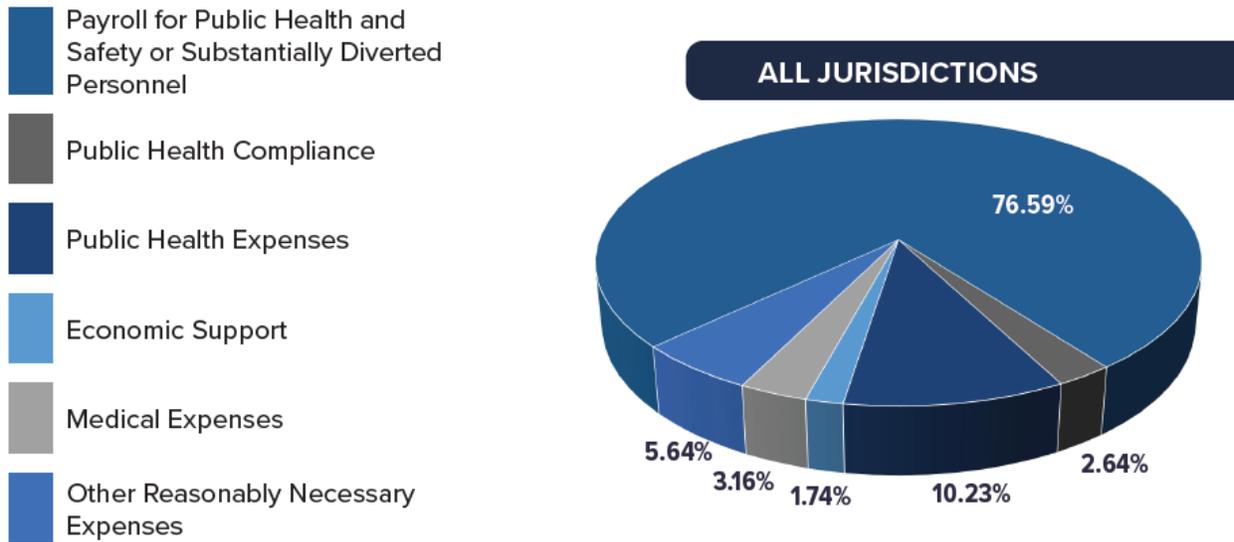
### Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF)

Texas received over \$11.24 billion of the \$150 billion CRF authorized by the CARES Act. Of that total, the United States Department of the Treasury distributed slightly more than \$3.20 billion directly to cities and counties in Texas with a population greater than 500,000; the remaining portion was distributed to the state. According to the CARES Act, the CRF could be used only for costs that:

- were necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency;
- were not accounted for in the budget most recently approved as of the date of enactment; and
- were incurred during the period that began on March 1, 2020, and ended on December 30, 2020 (this requirement was amended to reflect an end date of December 31, 2021 by CRRSAA).

The State of Texas was one of the first in the nation to ensure that a portion of the state's CRF allocation was distributed to local governments that did not receive funding directly from the Treasury Department. While this was not required by the CARES Act, nor by Treasury Department guidance, state leaders decided to ensure that local officials had the resources needed for their pandemic response. On May 11, 2020, state leadership informed mayors and county judges that they were eligible for reimbursement for direct COVID-19 expenditures. To date, local governments have claimed nearly \$545 million in reimbursements. Of that total, the following shows how those funds were utilized.

## CITY AND COUNTY REIMBURSEMENTS FROM THE STATE'S CRF ALLOCATION



State leaders have further supported local entities by providing significant public health investments statewide in response to the impacts of the pandemic - expending over half of the state's CRF allocation on public health and safety costs incurred to bolster local COVID-19 response efforts. The state utilized hundreds of millions of dollars from its own CRF allocation to establish a statewide testing infrastructure in a matter of weeks at the onset of the pandemic in Texas. Through the exhaustive efforts of the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), and with the support of private entities, testing capacity expanded exponentially. The state also used CRF funds to engage in mass procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) that TDEM distributed throughout the state to public and private entities. Early in the pandemic, the state's shipments often became the only lifeline to these critical supplies as healthcare providers' reserve stocks dwindled and normal supply chains slowed dramatically. TDEM's efforts were supported by the Texas Military Department and other state and private entities.

### Critical PPE Distributed Across Texas

- 447.20 million masks
- 115.8 million gloves
- 27.65 million gowns
- 9.18 million faceshields

The state, through the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), has provided substantial assistance to local healthcare providers by funding surge medical staffing to expand capacity statewide. As hospitals, nursing homes, and other facilities encountered diminishing staff and available beds, many local governments reached out for state assistance. It became apparent the state could more efficiently contract for surge staff and deploy them as needed across the state, compared to a more piecemeal approach of individual jurisdictions managing this part of the response. DSHS has provided thousands of additional contracted medical personnel such as registered nurses, respiratory therapists, certified nursing assistants, phlebotomists, and other technical positions who have contributed a combined 14.5 million staff hours as of the end of 2020. The billions of dollars the state shouldered have been critical as frontline healthcare workers were either inundated with cases or contracted COVID-19 themselves. While healthcare expenses would normally be covered by

local governments, the pandemic requires quick action and collaborative effort between the state and local entities to ensure Texans have access to the medical services they need.

In coordination with DSHS, TDEM has also deployed alternate care sites (ACS) across the state. ACSs are temporary or converted spaces that can provide acute, non-acute, or hospital care to individuals outside of traditional healthcare locations. These ACSs have been critical to COVID-19 response efforts when local capacity is overwhelmed from a spike in hospitalizations and when new capacity is needed to administer therapeutics capable of preventing additional hospital admissions. Created across the state, these sites leverage local healthcare capacity and ensure that citizens will still receive care during the pandemic.

Along with the more visible efforts of DSHS and TDEM, state agencies and institutions of higher education have made significant adjustments to their operations as part of the state's overall response to the pandemic. DSHS dedicated substantial resources to its ongoing response to COVID-19 including vaccine distribution. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Texas Department of Juvenile Justice, State Supported Living Centers, and State Mental Health Hospitals adapted their operations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within their facilities. State troopers at the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and game wardens at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department were drawn to the frontlines of numerous response efforts. Every state agency and institution of higher education has played a role in responding to the pandemic by adjusting operations and making resources available to ensure the safety of staff and students. All of these actions amassed considerable costs, and such duties were not contemplated when the budget was previously adopted by lawmakers. In accordance with the requirements of the CARES Act, and subsequent guidance from the Department of the Treasury, the state is utilizing approximately \$3.5 billion of the CRF to support these efforts, primarily for salary and benefits costs for public health and public safety related employees at state agencies and institutions of higher education that have been substantially dedicated to COVID-19 response efforts.

Through its CRF allocation, the state has committed approximately \$400 million to Texas schools to assist students, families, and teachers. Early in the pandemic, the state launched a reimbursement program for local education agencies' (LEA) COVID-19 costs and the initial transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 semester. In collaboration with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the state also launched Operation Connectivity, harnessing its significant buying power to purchase millions of learning devices for students. Including hotspots, personal laptops, and other eLearning devices, this investment enabled students to learn effectively and stay connected to their teachers and classmates from home. In addition to securing the devices - which were in high-demand nationwide - the state was able to achieve savings of 20% to 40% on these purchases. This bulk procurement enabled LEAs to get at-home learning devices into the hands of Texas students and teachers quickly and at a minimized cost.

#### Helping Students Stay Connected

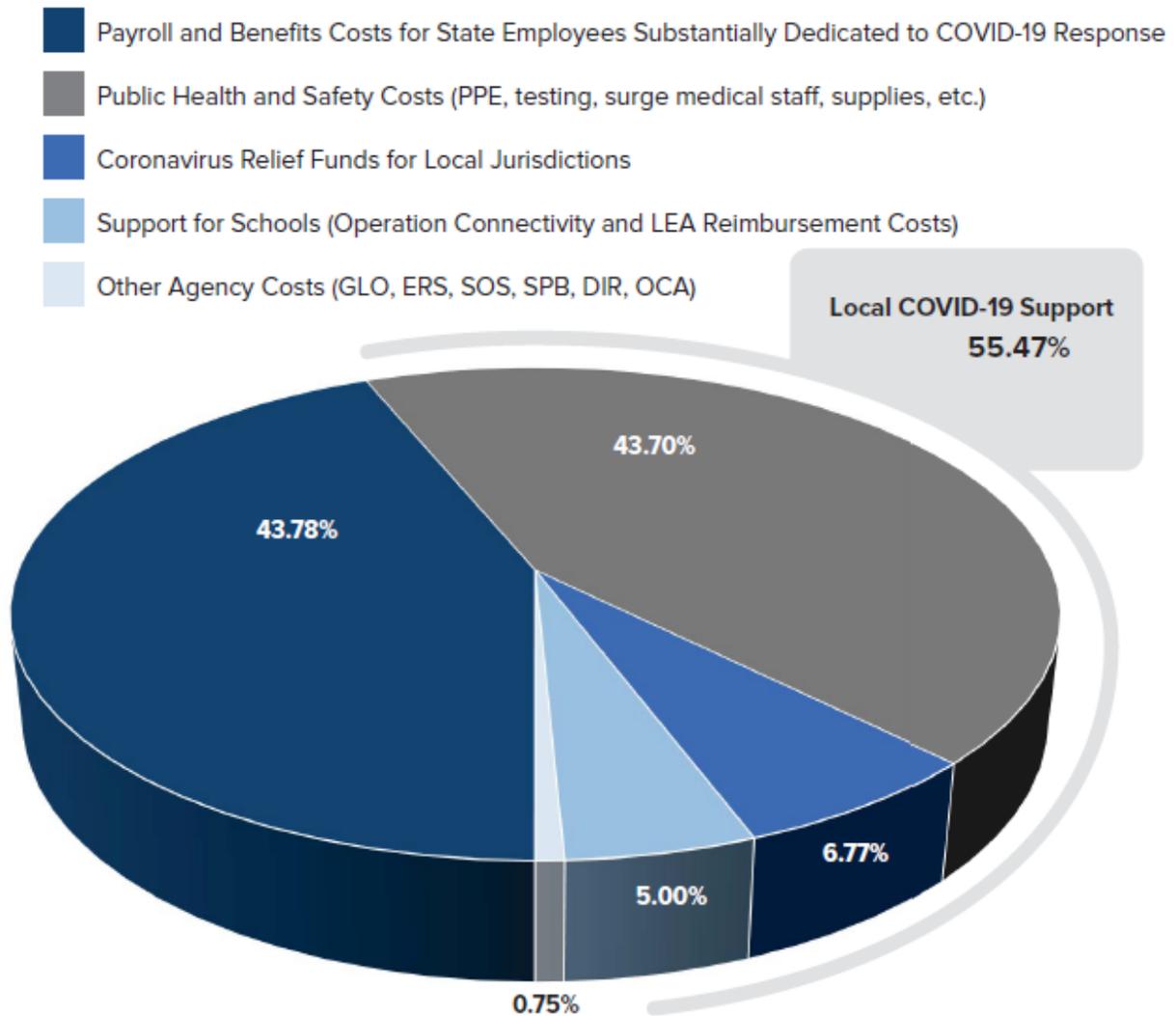
- Over 3.66 million e-Learning devices purchased
- Over 874,000 hotspots provided for students
- More than 800 LEAs utilized the bulk purchase program

State leaders also funded a statewide effort to respond to the essential civil legal needs of low-income Texans. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, many Texans found themselves unable to afford basic

civil legal services. This funding, through the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, provided a critical lifeline for those directly impacted by the pandemic during a period of significant economic hardship.

The State awarded funding to the Texas General Land Office and Veterans Land Board to address COVID-19 related costs at the Texas State Veterans Homes (TSVH). Over the course of the pandemic, these state-run facilities had to implement rigorous sanitization procedures, alterations to common spaces, and other modifications to ensure that residents were safely distanced - leading to both increased costs per resident and higher operating costs. The state allocated funding to address testing, increased costs of care, and other costs incurred by the TSVH directly due to the COVID-19 pandemic to support the continued provision of essential care to these veterans and their families.

### STATE USAGE OF THE CRF PRIORITIZING PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY



At the onset of the pandemic, many state agency offices were forced to temporarily close and agency staff had to quickly determine how to continue to provide critical state services from home. The state supported agencies in their transition to a work-from-home posture by funding activities at the Department of Information Resources (DIR) who developed the CARES Act Laptop Purchasing

Initiative. Leveraging the state’s purchasing power, DIR was able to secure large orders of laptops, headsets, and other remote-work technologies so that agency staff were able to work effectively and securely from home. The state’s CRF award to DIR likewise funded the expansion of internet bandwidth, computing capacity, and access to secure web-based video conferencing - all to further support both frontline agencies and the continued provision of state services to Texans. Using that funding, DIR created the Governor’s Open Texas and COVID-19 resource websites, as well as a website through which medical providers and disaster response personnel could request staffing support and be paired with volunteers identified by DSHS’ Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry.

Another significant effort impeded by the pandemic was the collection of data for the 2020 census. The state allocated CRF funding to the Secretary of State (SOS) to support outreach and make certain that Texans were aware of this critical effort and their opportunity to participate. This use of funds helped ensure the state received an accurate count and that Texans everywhere will be represented at the state and federal level.

As evidenced by these various spending initiatives, the state incurred significant costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including funding services normally left to local governments to provide during a disaster such as testing, PPE procurement, surge staffing, and alternate care sites. The majority of the state’s CRF funding was utilized to address public health and safety costs - any remaining CRF generated through public assistance reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will be utilized for other public health and safety costs that the state has and will incur to combat the pandemic in 2021.

#### Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)

Texas received an ESSER allocation of nearly \$1.29 billion from the more than \$13 billion authorized by the CARES Act. The enacting legislation required a minimum of 90% - or slightly more than \$1.1 billion - of that award be distributed directly to LEAs according to the federal Title I formula. Through TEA, the state distributed this funding to aid in sustaining a significant hold harmless policy for the spring 2020 semester. Since the school finance laws and formulas did not contemplate a scenario in which students would learn remotely outside of the traditional classroom setting, state leaders and TEA allowed for the continued funding of schools even though students were not physically present in the classroom. This multi-billion dollar hold harmless policy was essential for the health of students and teachers and to stabilize the entire public school system. State leaders have continued this hold harmless policy through the fall 2020 semester.

The remaining portion of ESSER funding was used to provide an optional, free tool for every school system in Texas to support virtual instruction. The Texas Home Learning (THL) Program included learning management system software, curricular models aligned with TEKS, progress monitoring diagnostics, teacher training and professional development, and other critical components that eased the transition to learning from home. These tools have been utilized by hundreds of school districts across the state and have helped minimize learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### THL Use Across Texas

- 415 school districts participating
- 320 LEAs using institutional materials
- 2 million + students reached

The recently approved CRRSAA included a substantial second tranche of ESSER funding. This additional allocation of ESSER provides an opportunity to maintain the progress and momentum of House Bill 3, while also making targeted investments to ensure students do not fall behind due to COVID-19 learning loss. This includes a program that state leaders announced in November 2020 to provide \$420 million for reimbursing other technology-related costs incurred by school systems since the end of the 2019-2020 school year and in preparation for the current one. The OOG will continue to work with the Legislature and the U.S. Department of Education to ensure school districts can reliably plan on the improved school finance formulas to make enduring decisions for their students.

#### Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER)

Of the nearly \$3 billion allocated by Congress, Texas received over \$307.02 million for the state's GEER fund. The recently approved CRRSAA allocated an additional \$134.33 million in a second round of GEER funding. Both Acts allowed the governors of each state to allocate GEER funding at their discretion for emergency support grants to both higher education and public education institutions deemed to have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. These funds were intended to support the ability of institutions to continue providing educational services to their students and to support ongoing operations. State leaders ensured this funding was used for strategic purposes to limit learning loss due to the pandemic and provide support for students to continue their progress towards a credential or degree.

A portion of GEER funding supported THL to provide instructional content and courses for multiple grade levels. It also provided for a remote dyslexia instructional platform to help address the unique needs of these students in transitioning to home learning. Funding was also provided to the Texas School for the Deaf, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Windham School District to ensure their critical activities were maintained.

GEER funds were also used to create the Supplementary Special Education Services (SSES) program. The student-centered SSES connects eligible students with severe cognitive disabilities to additional support, such as high-quality personalized programs, for the critical services they require. These additional services were intended to help those most affected by the pandemic and their transition to virtual education.

*The SSES program is yet another example of how effectively our state is working to close gaps in our system of public education. These one-time grants will positively impact thousands of Texas families and help students who require special education services to keep pace academically despite the ongoing disruptions tied to the pandemic.*

- Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath.

The state invested \$175 million of GEER funding in the state's higher education system for student financial aid, improvements in online learning, and enhanced data infrastructure capabilities. This investment included:

- \$57 million to ensure existing state financial aid programs were not negatively impacted;

- \$46.5 million in emergency student support so students whose families have been severely financially impacted by COVID-19 can stay enrolled in higher education;
- \$46.5 million in targeted financial aid for upskilling and reskilling displaced workers for jobs in high-demand fields;
- \$10 million to improve the quality of online learning by strengthening distance education offerings and bolstering institutions' capabilities to use data to support student success; and
- \$15 million for strategic education and workforce data infrastructure to provide timely, actionable intelligence to students, institutions, employers, and policymakers.

*These strategic investments in our students and institutions will keep more students on track to enter the workforce with the credentials and education that tomorrow's economy will demand.*

- *Commissioner of Higher Education Harrison Keller*

Strategically Using GEER to Ensure Texans Maintain Progress Towards Degree and Credential

- GEER supported over 17,000 students receiving current need based financial aid
- Over 40,000 students from 93 institutions received Emergency Education Grants
- Almost 12,000 students will receive Reskill and Upskill Grants

Community Development Block Grant - Coronavirus (CDBG-CV)

The CARES Act provided \$5 billion in CDBG-CV funding, of which Texas received approximately \$141.85 million. In the face of tremendous financial strain during the pandemic, many Texans were out of work, unable to feed their families, and facing possible eviction. The state is taking a targeted approach to assist those with the greatest need, and in partnership with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) and the Office of Court Administration (OCA), established the Texas Eviction Diversion Program. Using CDBG-CV funding, in combination with Community Service Block Grant funding that was also allocated through the CARES Act, the program offers up to six months of rental assistance to eligible tenants and landlords. Participating landlords can receive lump sum payments in exchange for allowing tenants to remain in their homes and the forgiveness of any late fees. The program will not only enable renters to stay in their homes and make property owners whole, but it will also help avoid mass evictions across the state and provide economic stability for vulnerable families. TDHCA is currently working with the federal government to expand this program to include mortgage assistance. As noted above, \$4.22 million of CRF was utilized for essential legal services through the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. In addition to housing assistance, as a growing number of Texans faced food insecurity, the state was also able to combine CDBG-CV, CRF, and FEMA funding to provide \$133 million for food bank distribution activities to aid local entities with demand.

*In times like these, sometimes that means that we search for creative ways to meet the needs of landlords and tenants. The Texas Judiciary is happy to work with Governor Abbott and TDHCA to provide a way for tenants to stay in their homes and ensure that landlords are made whole.*

- *Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht.*

## Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

Texas utilized CARES Act CCDBG funding along with existing childcare funds to support both parents and childcare providers. At the onset of the pandemic, the state funded frontline worker childcare to ensure adequate assistance was available for physicians, hospital staff, and other individuals who were critical to the initial COVID-19 response. The state also used CCDBG funding for enhanced reimbursement rates (ERR) for those subsidy providers that were able to remain open so they could implement adequate distancing and sanitization. For those providers that could not offer services, CCDBG offered stabilization grants to ensure they could retool their operations to ultimately serve children in the future. When in-person instruction in schools resumed, CCDBG funding was expanded to support full-day childcare for those whose schools were unable to remain physically open.

### Helping Parents and Providers

- 29,700 children of frontline workers assisted
- 5,600 providers received ERR

## Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding

The United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded the state \$42 million under the Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program. Allowable costs included overtime, equipment (including law enforcement and medical PPE), additional hiring, supplies (such as gloves, masks, sanitizer), and the medical needs of inmates in local jails and detention centers.

These grants were also made available to assist county jails with the costs of housing inmates awaiting transfer to the state prison system following TDCJ's decision to halt intake of new inmates due to ongoing outbreaks in local jails and TDCJ facilities. The OOG made this entire funding amount available to local entities.

### Providing Aid to Local Governments

- 249 cities and counties received funding
- Reimbursed 144,000 overtime hours for first responders

---

These historic investments across public health, public safety, and education supported local jurisdictions and demonstrate how Texas has effectively leveraged its CRF allocation and other supplemental federal funding in response to the pandemic. In partnership with legislative leaders, the careful use of these additional federal funds, combined with fiscal restraint, places Texas in a strong position for an accelerated recovery from COVID-19. Given the state's economic position due to the pandemic, legislators must make prudent decisions to provide for a healthier Texas, ensure a safer Texas, promote a freer Texas, and foster a more prosperous Texas.